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## A Chant Has Nine Lives: The Circulation of Theravada Liturgies in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam

The history of Theravada Buddhism—the dominant strand today for most Sinhalese, Burmese, Lao, Thai, and Khmer people, including Khmer speakers in southern Vietnam—is often narrated in terms of what Charles Hallisey calls “events.”<sup>1</sup> In particular, both contemporary historians and the authors of centuries-old chronicles in the liturgical language of Pali focus on the famous “councils” (Pali *saṅgīti* or *saṅgāyanā*, “chanting together”), gatherings at which Buddhist monastics recited the entirety of the core Pali scriptures, or Tipiṭaka, supposedly editing the canon in the process. Tracing the history of these councils as events that took place across South and Southeast Asia provides responses to an inquiry Hallisey condenses into “who had what texts when?”<sup>2</sup> Focusing on this kind of geographically and temporally specific information—the date when the Pali Tipiṭaka reached the kingdom of Lanna in northern Thailand, for example—induces us to see councils as crucial events that shaped the course of Theravada history.

On the other hand, Hallisey argues, we might instead see such councils as “ideas.” He crystalizes this conception into the question “what makes the Theravāda valid from the point of view of Theravādins?”<sup>3</sup> From this vantage

point, Buddhist councils are less moments frozen in time and more emblems of how Theravada followers understood what made certain texts authoritative and others spurious. Moreover, viewing the councils as ideas highlights a predominant model of sangha-state relations, especially the role of the righteous monarch in purifying Buddhist textual practice and monastic discipline.<sup>4</sup> Given the difficulty in determining the historicity of many Theravada councils, Hallisey's formulation of this events/ideas distinction allows for a richer retelling of the Buddhist past, one not limited by spatial and temporal particularities.

We may profitably extend this template to other features of Theravada history, including the transmission of texts and practices that don't fall within the conventional understanding of canon or Tipiṭaka and therefore were excluded from the councils. The focus on councils, whether as events or ideas, privileges an understanding that Theravada history was shaped by the spread and acceptance of a core set of Pali scriptures. As many have pointed out, textual authority in Theravada Buddhism is considerably broader and more complex than a modern printed edition of the Tipiṭaka might suggest.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the liturgical texts that shape daily chanting practices for the vast majority of Theravada Buddhists, both lay and monastic, often cannot be found in the canon at all.

While in modern times there is at least a broadly accepted view among Theravadins that the Tipiṭaka contains the core monastic rules [*vinaya*], discourses [*sutta*], and higher teachings [*abhidhamma*] as outlined by the Buddha, there is very little in the way of a standard liturgy. Theravada societies across linguistic, cultural, and national borders tend to share certain Pali canonical materials in their chanting curricula, including the three refuges [*tisaraṇa*], the five precepts [*pañcasīla*], various protective discourses [*paritta*], and fixed monastic rites [*kammavācā*] such as ordination [*pabbajjā/upasampadā*] and recitation of the monastic rule [*pāṭimokkha*]. Beyond these commonalities, however, most of the texts that Theravada Buddhists regularly recite and commit to memory are not directly excerpted from the Tipiṭaka but from much more recent Pali and vernacular compositions.

When Theravada Buddhism encounters a new cultural milieu, the transmission of the Tipiṭaka is not necessarily the defining historical moment.

There are plenty of Theravada communities for whom a “complete” copy of the Tipiṭaka—once extremely expensive as a material object due to the vast number of palm leaves or printed pages required—was never present until recent decades.<sup>6</sup> Setting the canon aside, another possible fulcrum is the adoption and transformation of a corpus of liturgical texts in a new cultural setting. Since Theravada Buddhism as a whole does not have a standard set of chants, each new culture that accepted this religious tradition had to either borrow those of a neighboring culture or invent new liturgies of their own. In practice, both the borrowing and the invention of liturgical texts were widespread, allowing distinctive cultural, political, and linguistic communities to create their own body of chants for daily worship and occasional rites.

In some contexts, these transformations of liturgical practice can be readily concretized as events, as in the case of Rama IV’s founding of the Dhammayuttika monastic order in nineteenth-century Siam and the concomitant creation of a new set of liturgical practices based on Mon antecedents, as well as the king’s composition of new Pali texts.<sup>7</sup> In other instances, such as the development of a distinct set of chants in “hybrid Pāli” among the Tai Nuea in northern Laos and southwestern China, the specific historical circumstances remain unknown.<sup>8</sup> We can nevertheless inquire into these liturgical transformations as “ideas.” In the case of the Tai Nuea, these chants have authority on the basis of being passed down through local oral tradition. In other contexts, such as the *Atavisi Buddha Puja* developed by Panadure Ariyadhamma in Sri Lanka, the local power of the liturgy rests in its association with a charismatic founder.<sup>9</sup> The processes by which communities adopt and transform Theravada chants can thus be read as either the confluence of particular circumstances (“events”) or conceptions (“ideas”).

This essay applies Hallisey’s articulation of Buddhist history in terms of both events and ideas to the transmission of Theravada Buddhism among urban Kinh communities in what is now southern Vietnam, first in colonial Cochinchina and later in the Republic of Vietnam. In particular, I focus on the adoption and transformation of a single liturgical text—a chant, originally in Pali, to invite a monk to give a sermon—as it circulates across Thailand and Cambodia before its eventual translation from Khmer into Vietnamese in the mid-twentieth century. My aim is to challenge the way we

narrate the spread of Theravada Buddhism by examining how liturgies change as they circulate within and beyond particular cultures.

This examination of liturgical chants provides a way to contest more conventional top-down or bottom-up models of how religions spread, for these texts are recited by Buddhists of all genders, ranks, and livelihoods, both monastic and lay. Unlike the voluminous entirety of the Tipiṭaka and its many layers of commentaries, Theravada chants tend to be brief enough for the average monk, nun, or layperson to memorize, with or without the benefit (or curse!) of literacy. In studies of Theravada history, however, transformations of liturgical texts remain underappreciated as both events and ideas that shaped how Buddhism took root in new cultures.

The inception of a distinctly Kinh form of Theravada Buddhism in southern Vietnam challenges common tellings of Buddhist history in the region, for it crosses both sectarian and linguistic boundaries. The predominant form of Buddhism among the Kinh is known as Mahayana [*Đại thừa* 大乘 (great vehicle)] and shares a Sinitic-language canon [*Tam tạng* 三藏, or *Tripitaka*] with its counterparts in China, Japan, and Korea. While Khmer Theravada Buddhism has flourished in the Mekong Delta for centuries, its adoption by Vietnamese-speaking communities there is relatively recent. The vast majority of Buddhist temples in Vietnam still follow a Mahayana orientation, and only a small percentage of the country's Theravada temples serve Vietnamese speakers instead of Khmer. Kinh Theravada Buddhists are thus a minority within a minority and receive almost no mention in standard treatments of Vietnamese Buddhist history.<sup>10</sup>

The key events surrounding the transmission of Theravada Buddhism to Vietnamese speakers in southern Vietnam are nevertheless clear. The story begins with a Hà Nội-trained veterinarian named Lê Văn Giảng (1893–1981). Born near Châu Đốc in Cochinchina, he spent much of his youth and civil service career in Cambodia. After a long spiritual quest, in 1934 Lê Văn Giảng had a transformative encounter with the leading Theravada reformist monk in Phnom Penh, Juon Nāt (1883–1969), then a deputy abbot of Vatt Uṇṇālom.<sup>11</sup> Over the next six years, Lê Văn Giảng taught meditation and published a few Buddhist books in Vietnamese before eventually seeking his wife's permission to renounce family life in favor of monastic ordination. In 1939, he returned to Cochinchina to found the first Kinh Theravada

temple in Sài Gòn, Chùa Bửu Quang [Radiance of the Three Jewels Temple].<sup>12</sup> With Juon Nāt as his preceptor, in 1940 Lê Văn Giảng donned the robes of a *bhikkhu*, taking the monastic name Hộ Tông (Vaṅsarakkhita, “Protected by the Lineage”).<sup>13</sup> By the late 1950s, the Vietnamese Theravada community he founded was increasingly connected to like-minded reformist circles in Burma, Sri Lanka, and beyond.

While rarely mentioned in accounts of the 1930–1945 Buddhist revival [*chấn hưng Phật Giáo*], Hộ Tông and his Vietnamese Theravada peers were undoubtedly influenced by what Shawn McHale and others identify as a burgeoning Buddhist print culture in this period.<sup>14</sup> Given the urban focus of the Kinh Theravada movement, it is unsurprising that its founders produced a wealth of books that articulated their vision of Theravada Buddhism to a Vietnamese audience. Well into the 1960s and early 1970s, Hộ Tông and his Theravada peers in the Republic of Vietnam continued to publish extensively in Vietnamese, including numerous translations of both canonical and liturgical texts.

At first glance, these books seem to follow their supposed Pali antecedents quite carefully. Upon closer examination, many of Hộ Tông’s works are in fact translations from various unacknowledged Khmer authors. For example, Hộ Tông’s liturgical collection *Lễ bái tam-bảo, cư-sĩ luật tóm tắt* [Rites for Venerating the Triple Gem, Abbreviated Rules for Laypeople] is a translation of Juon Nāt and Ūṃ Sūr’s *Traipraṇāṃ saṅkhep niṅ gihivināy saṅkhep* [Abbreviated Veneration of the Triple Gem and Abbreviated Rules for Laypeople].<sup>15</sup> These Vietnamese texts, presented as direct translations from the Pali, are in fact filtered through the intermediary of Khmer. This is true for many of Hộ Tông’s other publications, including *Dasa pāramī: thập độ* [The Ten Perfections], *Qui-vương vấn-đạo* [Questions of the Ogres], and *Luật xuất-gia tóm tắt* [Abbreviated Rules for Ordination].<sup>16</sup> All of these are Vietnamese versions of existing Khmer works, with their Cambodian origins conveniently elided.<sup>17</sup> Hộ Tông was evidently proficient in Khmer from his many years of schooling, work, and Buddhist practice in Cambodia. But why might Hộ Tông (or his publishers) have felt the need to hide his Khmer sources?

Heeding Hallisey’s call to trace Theravada phenomena as ideas as well as events, we should consider the ideology behind this choice and how it

shaped the transmission of Theravada texts in Vietnam, particularly liturgies. Given that the appeal of a modern Theravada Buddhism for mid-twentieth-century urban Vietnamese was grounded in its claims of being both ancient and universal, the elision of Hộ Tông's Cambodian intermediaries makes sense. After all, if Vietnamese Buddhists had wanted to study *Khmer* Buddhism, Khmer-speaking Buddhist communities abounded in southern Vietnam. But the recently converted Vietnamese Theravadins in Sài Gòn wanted something they could call their own, and thus distanced themselves from the local Khmer.<sup>18</sup> Hộ Tông's covert translations successfully portrayed this form of Buddhism as derived not from recent developments in Phnom Penh but from an "original" [*nguyên-thủy*] strand.<sup>19</sup> This tradition, which was just beginning to be called "Theravada" in other countries,<sup>20</sup> was then in the midst of a global resurgence in popularity, particularly in the years prior to the Sixth Buddhist Council, held in Burma from 1954 to 1956.<sup>21</sup> The Kinh Theravada community still uses the term "original Buddhism" [*Phật Giáo nguyên-thủy*] as its primary marker of identity in Vietnamese, sometimes accompanied by "Theravada" or, more rarely, *Nam tông* [Southern school].

Hộ Tông's choice to elide the Khmer inspirations for his books must be seen in the context of broader Southeast Asian attitudes toward authorship and translation, particularly in Buddhist circles. Most short religious works in mainland Southeast Asia, especially those popular beyond the court, were passed down without any explicit authorial attribution. Many of these texts—including the chanted poems that comprise the liturgical corpus for both daily rites and special occasions—are not just translations, but translations of translations. This is the case not only for Hộ Tông's works (Pali to Khmer to Vietnamese) but also for many chants in Cambodia, northeast Myanmar, and southern Yunnan, where Pali texts passed through a Central or Northern Thai intermediary before finally being translated into a local dialect. The proliferation of strikingly similar narratives, sermons, and poems across Burmese, Khmer, Mon, and Tai/Thai cultures points to an exceptionally complex web of translation and circulation in Southeast Asia that scholars are just beginning to chart.<sup>22</sup>

Theravada liturgies, in other words, are products of circulation and local adaptation, rather than direct canonical transmission. Hộ Tông's peers

eventually translated the entire Pali Tipiṭaka directly into Vietnamese, a task completed by the monks Indacanda (translator of the Vinaya), Thích Minh Châu (the Suttas), and Tịnh Sự (the Abhidhamma).<sup>23</sup> For creating a body of liturgical chants, however, there was no preexisting set of universal Pali texts for the pioneers of the Kinh Theravada community to turn to. They had to either invent a totally new liturgy or adapt one already in use. Hộ Tông chose the latter, adapting the entire modernist liturgy arranged and composed in Pali and Khmer by Juon Nāt, Ūm Sūr, and other leading Cambodian monks of his day. He transliterated the Pali portions into the standard form of Roman script used by international scholars of Pali and Sanskrit, complete with the requisite diacritics, and translated the Khmer portions into Vietnamese in *quốc ngữ* script.

The result was a parallel liturgy in Pali and Vietnamese that has served the Kinh Theravada community up to the present day. Recordings of almost all of Hộ Tông's chant translations are widely available online and continue to be recited in *Phật Giáo nguyên-thủy* rituals, both in Vietnam and in diaspora. A chanting cadence has developed that allows the portions in Pali to be recited in approximately the same range of pitch and rhythm as the Vietnamese portions, creating the appearance of a seamless whole.

Under the surface, however, each of the chants in *Lễ bài tam-bảo, cư-sĩ luật tóm tắt* and other liturgical works by Hộ Tông tells a distinctive story. Since Theravada chants tend to travel and circulate, many of the liturgical texts presented and translated by Hộ Tông had already passed through many incarnations by the time they arrived in Sài Gòn. This essay takes up the story of one particularly well-traveled chant that appears in no fewer than nine major iterations in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Hộ Tông's version, "Bài thỉnh pháp sư" [Verses for Inviting a Preacher of the Dharma], first published in 1954,<sup>24</sup> is the latest; the earliest source text is the opening verse of the *Buddhavaṃsa*, a late addition to the Pali canon likely composed in South Asia during the first few centuries of the common era. Seven intermediary steps, including translations in mid-second-millennium Southeast Asia, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Thailand, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cambodia, fill out the rest of the story. Though not all chants have nine lives, the journey from *Buddhavaṃsa* to

“Bài thỉnh pháp sư” illuminates the patterns of textual circulation in Theravada contexts and the central role of translation in this process.

In using the term “life” to describe each of the nine iterations of the chant that eventually becomes “Bài thỉnh pháp sư,” I highlight how each individual liturgical text is both complete in and of itself (a full life, as it were), as well as part of long history of cyclic transmission across lives (in a nod to the Buddhist notion of *saṃsāra* [*luân hồi* 輪迴]). Viewed from these two perspectives, the transformations of “Bài thỉnh pháp sư” and each of its antecedents are both specific “events” in Theravada history as well as “ideas” that transcend particular points in space and time. To trace the chronological development of any particular chant, we need to see each transformation or translation as a bounded event within a known context. On the other hand, the Siamese, Cambodian, and Vietnamese Buddhists who have recited the various lives of “Bài thỉnh pháp sư” over the centuries must have cherished their particular chant for its affective qualities, not its position in history. For contemporary Vietnamese Theravadins, the force of “Bài thỉnh pháp sư” is not that it was translated from Khmer by Hộ Tông some seventy years ago, but that it expresses the ritual solemnity of inviting a monastic to preach, the same governing idea shared by its previous eight lives.

The remainder of this essay unpacks each of the nine incarnations of this chant. As the linguistic and historical specifics of these lives unfold, I draw attention to the broader patterns of translation and circulation behind the story of “Bài thỉnh pháp sư.” In particular, I show how chants grow as they circulate, how Theravada liturgies unsettle distinctions between classical and vernacular languages, and how ritual and ideological necessities shape translation in new cultural contexts. Translators of short Buddhist chants in Southeast Asia, including Hộ Tông and his Siamese and Khmer predecessors, tend to follow three unstated principles: (1) the translation may be longer than its source, but rarely vice versa, (2) even when translated into the vernacular, the Pali source ought to be retained, and (3) the resulting bilingual Pali-vernacular chant should bring its performance practices—gestures, melodies, and rhythms—into harmony. These principles are crucial for understanding the historical processes that made the transmission of Theravada Buddhism across Southeast Asia possible.



## First and Second Lives: The *Buddhavaṃsa* verse from South to Southeast Asia

When inviting a monk to give a sermon in contemporary Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, as well as in both Khmer and Kinh Theravada communities in Vietnam, it is customary for a layperson or group of laypeople to first recite a Pali stanza and/or one of its vernacular translations. The Pali stanza recalls the moment when the Buddha, having just reached awakening and still reluctant to teach the Dharma, is invited by the Brahmā deity Sahampati to preach the contents of his awakening so that sentient beings may benefit. This is the Pali form of the stanza most often heard today in Southeast Asian communities:

brahmā ca lokādhipatī sahapatī	Brahmā Sahampati, Lord of the World,
katañjali andhivaraṃ ayācatha	palms folded together, beseeched the Unexcelled One:
sant'īdha sattā 'pparajakkhajātikā	“There exist, here below, beings with minor defilements—
desetu dhammaṃ	preach the Dhamma; have mercy for this
anukamp'imaṃ pajāṃ <sup>25</sup>	generation.” <sup>26</sup>

This verse originally led another life. Its initial incarnation was as the opening verse of the *Buddhavaṃsa*, composed in South Asia in the first few centuries of the common era. There the verse has no discernible ritual function; it simply inaugurates a long description and praise of the marvelous powers of a buddha, beginning with his compassion toward other beings.<sup>27</sup> We do not know if or how this verse was recited independently of the *Buddhavaṃsa* in South Asia, but sometime between the stanza's transmission to Southeast Asia and the onset of its widespread ritual recitation an important metrical change occurred, regularizing the syllabic arrangement of the text and making it easier to chant.

This change, perhaps enacted between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries CE, marks the beginning of the second life of the verse, one independent from its original context in the *Buddhavaṃsa*. Regarding the specifics of this metrical transformation, Peter Skilling shows how the canonical verse has been rewritten into a consistent twelve-syllable *indravaṃśa* meter with the stress pattern — — U — — U U — U — U — such that it may be performed in the same meter throughout each of the four lines.<sup>28</sup> This, in



āñ <sub>2</sub> hefu p̄rahbhed s̄ā(v)	“According to the division of beings
uṣṣāpāti ṇa lok sakal	who are born in the universe,
s̄ā(v) dī <sub>1</sub> mī mīṭ man	beings whose minds are dull,
mala haī <sub>2</sub> kiles p̄ralāy	polluted, and wracked with defilement
mī ayū <sub>1</sub> ṇa lok hlā <sub>2</sub>	still exist in earthly realms
gaṇanā naḥ sut caḥ khai	in numbers incalculable.
khaa aṅ(g) braḥ caam írai	Please, may the Lord of the Three Worlds,
mana kiö <sub>2</sub> p̄raḥkaap karuṇ	whose heart of succor brims with mercy,
drañ deśanā p̄rot	preach so they might be saved,
salah̄ chot p̄raḥsādan sund(ar)	cast off ignorance, and achieve goodness,
p̄vañ s̄ātv caḥ sap guṇ-	such that beings might reach the virtues
ṇa nibbān srāñ hadāy. <sup>30</sup>	of Nibbāna and pacify their minds.”

This version likely predates the others for several reasons. First, the diction is older and more challenging for contemporary readers, with a number of unusual pronunciations prescribed by the meter, including several that cross line breaks.<sup>31</sup> Second, the translation adds little in terms of new content. Certain aspects are elaborated: we learn, for instance, that Sahampati “cleansed his mind” before his request, that beings suitable to be taught exist in “numbers incalculable,” and that those who listen to the Buddha may achieve Nibbāna. These details are implied but not explicitly stated in the Pali verse. Third, in contrast to most of the remaining incarnations of this chant from the nineteenth century onward, there is no direct invitation to a monk to give a sermon. In other words, the chant recounts how Sahampati petitioned the Buddha, but does not overtly extend this invitation to the immediate ritual context of requesting a monk to preach.

Another version, found in several printed chanting books, expands the text beyond a straightforward vernacular translation of the Pali verse. In addition to recounting how the Buddha was invited to preach by Sahampati, this version includes an explicit invitation for a living monk to give a sermon:

sahāmpatī brahm	Sahampatī Brahma,
p̄én param nāi lokā	foremost in the worlds,
mī ṛd(dhi) lèḥ tejā-	possessed force, might,
nubhāb nāi gaṇā brahm	and power among the Brahma-deities.

dāṃ añjalivād sthit āsa(n) ṇa dī <sub>1</sub> sam gvar lēv <sub>2</sub> kā pāṅgam dhulī pād braḥ śāstā	Having pressed his palms together he sat in a respectful spot and bowed in homage to the dust beneath the feet of the Teacher.
khaa braḥ pavar lōś sut p̄raḥsrōṭḥ maholā(r) vā <sub>1</sub> p̄vañ p̄raḥjā ā- savaḥ naay <sub>2</sub> kā yañ mī	“May the Lord who exceeds the best of the best, the lofty one, be informed that living beings whose defilements are few still exist.
jōñ añ(g) braḥ sāmbuddh parisud(dhi) braḥ indrī(y) p̄rot p̄vañ p̄raḥjā hā <sub>2</sub> lu dāñ kṣem sān(t)	May the Lord, the Perfect Buddha, whose senses are purified, save the mass of living beings, that they might attain peaceful bliss.”
cñ añ(g) muni p̄rāj(ñ) varanāth braḥ dāy pān rāp bar brahm kā toy ṭhān braḥ kāruṇyaḥbhāb mī	Then the Lord, the wise Sage, the great Protector, whose heart was open, assented to the Brahmā-deity on the grounds of his august compassion.
niman(ṭ) braḥ guṇ dān <sub>1</sub> phū <sub>2</sub> p̄riep p̄ān braḥ jinasī(h) p̄rot phōy braḥ dhaṛm jī <sub>2</sub> hā <sub>2</sub> kraḥcāñ <sub>1</sub> svāñ <sub>1</sub> dōñ <sup>32</sup>	We invite you, O Venerable, you who are comparable to the Victor, save beings and spread the Dharma so as to illuminate and enlighten.

In this version, whose language suggests a nineteenth-century composition, the first four stanzas translate the Pali verse. The fifth stanza narrates the Buddha’s assent to Sahampati’s request. The sixth stanza provides the justification for using both the Pali stanza and its Siamese translation in the ritual of inviting a monk to preach. By proclaiming that the monk before them is “comparable to the Victor,” the lay audience invites him to give a sermon for the same reason the Brahmā deity beseeched the Buddha: to compassionately save living beings. The translation thus makes explicit the implied ritual function of the chant.

All the Siamese versions known to me are in the *kāby yānī* 11 meter, equivalent to the Khmer *brahmagīti* meter. This 5–6–5–6 arrangement in twenty-two syllables per stanza is not an exact match to the Pali *indravaṃśa* meter, with its twelve syllables per line. However, since the Pali meter is divided in



While the origins of this verse are uncertain, it was likely composed in Siam as a companion to the first for use in the same ritual context of inviting a monk to give a sermon. The closely parallel metrical form again allows this new stanza to be recited in the same way as the first stanza. The content expands on Sahampati's entreaty to the Buddha to break his silence by beating "the drum of the true Dhamma," composed of the three baskets of the Pali Tipiṭaka (the Vinaya, the Sutta, and the Abhidhamma). Moreover, the verse is careful to note that the Buddha should preach to "those fit to be led" (*neyye*), in other words to the "beings with minor defilements" (*sattā 'pparajakkhajātikā*) mentioned in the first stanza, who are capable of achieving awakening. This expansion of the Pali represents the fourth life of this chant.

The fifth life, a Pali-Siamese prose version of the two verses, likely dates from the same eighteenth-century period as the previous. In fact, the earliest extant evidence for this version appears in the same volume.<sup>35</sup> Here the *Buddhavaṃsa* stanza and the new Pali verse appear alongside their translation into Siamese. Instead of a verse translation, however, this chant collection includes a syntactically rearranged, grammatically annotated, word-by-word prose translation, or what I call an *interphrasal Pali-vernacular bitext*.<sup>36</sup> In my presentation of this composition below, portions in roman type represent the original Pali verses, italicized words denote Pali terms added by the author of the bitext to clarify the verses, and boldface indicates the glosses into Siamese. Grammatical notations for various noun cases and verbal moods appear in small caps (NOM = nominative case; ACC = accusative case; INS = instrumental case; VOC = vocative case; PL = plural; IMP = imperative mood; LOC = locative case; GEN = genitive case).

brahmā ān vā<sub>1</sub> dāv<sub>2</sub> mahābrahm saḥampati jīa<sub>1</sub> saḥampatī brahm  
lokādhipatī pen hñāī, naī lok katañjali mī praḥnam braḥ kar kradām lēv<sub>2</sub>  
ayācatha ārādhanā adhivaraṃ jīñ<sub>1</sub> braḥ buddha añ(g) phū<sub>2</sub> praḥsrōṭṭh yin<sub>1</sub>  
vacena tvay<sub>2</sub> gāṃ iti tāñ nī<sub>2</sub> bhante bhagavā khā<sub>2</sub> fè, samtéc braḥ buddha  
añ(g) phū<sub>2</sub> drañ svāstibhāg(y) sattā ān vā<sub>1</sub> sātv dāñ<sub>2</sub> hlāy apparajakkhajātikā  
mī dhulī gīa rāgādikileś āñ naay<sub>2</sub> naī pāññācākṣu pen sabhāvaḥ santi mī  
idha loke naī lok nī<sub>2</sub> bhagavā āñ vā<sub>1</sub> braḥ buddha añ(g) drañ svāstibhāg(y)  
upādāya āsrāy lēv<sub>2</sub> anukampaṃ jīñ<sub>1</sub> anugroḥ(h) imaṃ pajam jīñ sātv nī<sub>2</sub>  
desetu cañ deśanā dhammaṃ jīñ<sub>1</sub> braḥ dhārm. tvaṃ āñ vā<sub>1</sub> braḥ añ(g)

ākotaṃyanto cañ pānḷā saddhammabheriṃ jññ, klaaṇ gā braḥ sāddhaṃ  
 vinayañcakāyaṃ mī tvā klaaṇ gā braḥ vināy abhidhammacammaṃ mī hnāñ  
 hum<sub>2</sub> gā braḥ abhidhaṃ suttañ ca bandhaṃ mī jñōk riñ khññ hnāñ gā  
 braḥ sūtr catusaccadaṇḍaṃ tvay<sub>2</sub> mai<sub>2</sub> tī klaaṇ gā braḥ caṭurāriyasāc  
 majjhe naī dām, klāñ parisāya hēñ caṭubidhapaṃbasāj neyye yañ  
 bodhanaiyasātv pabodha cañ haī<sub>2</sub> trāsa rū<sub>2</sub>

Brahmā NOM **The Lord Mahābrahm** Sahampati **named Sahampati** Brahm,  
 Lord of the World **who is foremost in the world**, palms folded together **who**  
**had pressed his palms together** beseeched **invited** the Unexcelled One ACC  
**the Buddha who is most excellent** with words INS with words like this like so:  
*O Venerable Blessed One* “VOC **Lord Buddha, the Blessed One!** All beings  
 NOM.PL **Beings** with minor defilements **whose nature is such that they have**  
**dust, that is to say, defilements such as lust, only to a small degree in their**  
**eyes of wisdom**, exist exist here below **in this world.** *The Blessed One* NOM  
**The Lord Buddha, the Blessed One,** *having resorted* **having resorted** to  
 compassion ACC **to mercy** for this generation ACC **to these beings**, preach IMP  
**preach** the Dhamma ACC **the Dharma.** You NOM **Lord**, striking IMP **sound** the  
 drum of the true Dhamma **the drum that is the True Dharma**, whose frame is  
 the Vinaya, **whose frame is the Vinaya**, whose leather head is the Abhidhamma  
**whose wrapped skin is the Abhidhamma**, whose straps are the Sutta **whose**  
**leather binding strings are the Sūtra**, whose mallet is the Four Truths INS **with**  
**the mallet that is the Four Noble Truths**, in the midst LOC **in the midst** of the  
 assembly GEN **of the fourfold assembly** those fit to be led ACC **to the beings**  
**who can be awakened**, awaken IMP **that they may be awakened.”**

The bitext unpacks the difficulties of the first verse by adding several Pali words, including *vacena*, *iti*, *bhante bhagavā*, *bhagavā*, and *upādāya*, to clarify what was only implicit in the original stanza. Furthermore, it interprets the Pali source in novel ways. For example, the fourth line of the first Pali stanza, *desetu dhammaṃ anukamp’imaṃ pajam*, can be most simply understood as two imperative verb phrases: *desetu* (“preach”) + *dhammaṃ* (“the Dhamma”) and *anukampa* (“be compassionate”) + *imaṃ pajam* (“to this generation”).<sup>37</sup> The bitext adds the addition of *bhagavā* (“the Blessed One,” i.e., the Buddha) and the gerund form *upādāya* (“having resorted”). The bitext then reorders the words as follows:

*bhagavā ān vā, braḥ buddha añ(g) drañ svāstibhāg(y) upādāya āsrāy lēv<sub>2</sub>*  
*anukampaṃ jññ<sub>1</sub> anugroḥ(h) imaṃ pajam jññ sātv nī<sub>2</sub> desetu cañ deśanā*  
*dhammaṃ jññ<sub>1</sub> braḥ dhārm*

*The Blessed One* NOM **The Lord Buddha, the Blessed One**, *having resorted*  
**having resorted** to compassion ACC **to mercy** for this generation ACC **to these**  
**beings**, preach IMP **preach** the Dhamma ACC **the Dharma**.

The Pali second-person imperative form *anukampa* (“be compassionate”) is reanalyzed as *anukampaṃ*, an accusative singular noun (“to compassion”). This noun is then fixed as the direct object of the inserted verb *upādāya* (“having resorted”). The full line then reads: “Blessed One, having resorted to compassion for this generation, preach the Dhamma.”<sup>38</sup> The bitext thus interprets how each phrase should be construed, providing a basis of further exegesis and literary elaboration.

Despite the apparent mess it first presents to the eyes, the bilingual presentation of the text allows for rapid comprehension. One can proceed by sequentially reading all the non-bold words in Pali or all of the bold words in vernacular. Each constructs perfectly logical and coherent sentences on their own. In fact, a Thai auditor of this text, even one untrained in Pali grammar, would be able to understand its vernacular sentence structure despite the irruptions of the classical language. The Pali frames and provides structure to the Siamese phrases; it need not be considered distracting or extraneous. The appeal of bitexts is not limited to the visual, for such bilingual presentations would have been an important staple of sermons in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Siam. Alas, we do not know the specific function of this composition as recorded in *Svat man(í) plè chpāp haa braḥ samut vajirañāṇ*. Since this compilation is a collection of chants, we can presume the bitext within it was once performed as written above, even though it is never recited as such in Thailand today.

### Sixth Life: Khmer Verse Translation of Both Pali Stanzas

Despite the elegance of the second Pali stanza and its bitextual presentation in eighteenth-century Siam, I have yet to encounter a Tai-language verse text that translates the second stanza. This apparent lacuna is filled by a sixth life of the chant, found only in Cambodia. This text, typically known as “Dhammadesanāyācana-gāthā” [Stanzas inviting the preaching of the Dhamma], probably dates to the early nineteenth century. It has been almost entirely



forgotten by the Khmer, eclipsed by the eighth life of the chant penned in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.<sup>39</sup>

The sixth life of the chant leads with a single Pali stanza and follows with a nine-stanza Khmer translation in the *brahmagīti* meter. This is followed in turn by the second Pali stanza (of the fourth and fifth lives), and concludes with an eight-stanza Khmer translation in the same meter. The use of the *brahmagīti* meter (5-6-5-6), which matches the syllable count of the second Pali stanza as well as the Siamese *kāby yānī* 11 meter witnessed above in the Tai-language verse versions of the first Pali stanza, suggests that the Khmer translator seeks a semblance of ritual equivalence with at least the Pali texts, if not also the Siamese ones. In other words, the new Khmer text may be recited in a consistent melody throughout, one that closely parallels those used in contemporary Thailand.

In comparison to the extant Siamese versions, however, the translation of the first stanza is considerably more expansive. Though put into fluent vernacular verse, it still contains a few technical particles typical of the bitextual style, in a nod to its probable roots in the fifth iteration of the chant from Siam (NOM = nominative case; VOC = vocative case):

rī brahm tá jā dhaṃ	NOM The foremost Brahmā,
krai lèn brahm phaṅ nānā	greater than all other Brahmā gods,
döp lut braḥ jaṅghā	lowered himself to his shins,
lök hatthā namassakār.	with hands raised in reverence.
pabitr braḥ aṅg öy	“VOC Venerable! O Lord!
braḥ guṇ öy süm mettā	O virtuous one, I humbly beseech you
pros satv manuss devatā	to save beings, both humans and gods—
draṅ' karuṇā samtèn dhaṛm.	have mercy and preach the Dharma.
tpit satv dandīṅ nās'	For beings wait anxiously
cām braḥ pān trās' niṅ trek ar	for your awakening so they can rejoice,
niṅ pān stāp' braḥ dhaṛm	flock to listen to the Dharma,
höy niṅ ka ruoc cāk dukkh.	and be free from suffering;
tpit satv phaṅ nānā	for all living beings
mān avijjā bol gī lāmak	are ignorant, that is to say, filthy,
ṭuc dhūli phaṅ' ṭī bhak'	as if dust and layers of silt
kakar l'ak' jāp' netrā.	cake into mud and lodge in their eyes.

<p>broḥ tè moha: dhaṃ  mok ruop ruṃ juṃ kāyā  oy āp' an' prājñā  buṃ oy ghōñ braḥ trailakkha(ṇ).</p> <p>ñañat ñañal' ñap'  höy jrul jrap' ṭuc manuss khvāk'  ralö höy ralāk'  ṭuc antāk' rip jāp' ka.</p> <p>niñ rak anak ñā muoy  niñ mak juoy srāy ká kra  mān p"untè braḥ saddhaṃ  döp niñ mak juoy srāy pān.</p> <p>hetu noḥ braḥ aṅg öy  braḥ guṇ öy sūm pros prāñ  ṭpid brahm khñuṃ rāp' ān  cūl mak thkāñ ārādhana.</p> <p>braḥ dhaṃ thlai viṣes  lat' kiles nūv taṇhā  nāṃ citt oy jrah thlā  somanassā gmāñ sau hmañ.</p>	<p>Since their delusion is great,  wrapping tight around their bodies,  clouding their wisdom,  they can't see the Three Marks.</p> <p>Completely enveloped in darkness  and crouched over like the blind,  they're confused and they convulse,  as if strangled by a noose.</p> <p>To find even one person  to help release them is hard;  only the True Dharma  could help liberate them.</p> <p>For this reason, O Lord,  O virtuous one, please rescue them,  for I, Brahmā, respectfully  come to invite you to preach</p> <p>the most precious Dharma,  which calms craving and lust,  leading the mind to faith, joy,  and freedom from anguish."</p>
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The Khmer translation for this passage adds many details concerning the extent of the ignorance of living beings, including their confusions regarding the Three Marks. Indeed, these details overshadow the force of the third line in the original Pali: “There are, here below, beings with minor defilements” [*sant'īdha sattā 'pparajakkhajātikā*]. The Pali stanza works on the principle that there are in fact a few beings whose defilements are small (*appa + rajas + adjectival ka = apparajakkha*) or whose eyes contain only a little dust (*appa + rajas + akkha = apparajakkha*) such that they might actually comprehend the Buddha's sublime Dharma. Sahampati is arguing that it is for the sake of those rare wise beings that the Buddha should preach. The Khmer stanzas, by contrast, imply that all living beings are helplessly mired in ignorance. The author of this version memorably expands on the nature of this ignorance: “Completely enveloped

in darkness / and crouched over like the blind, / they're confused and they convulse, / as if strangled by a noose." These lines, while absent from the Pali and Siamese antecedents, heighten the stakes for the ritual invitation to preach. They also demonstrate how the process of transferring a chant from one Theravada culture to another in Southeast Asia usually results in an expanded text. In this case, the doctrine shifts as well. The Buddha's mandate is no longer restricted to a select few; he is instead called to teach all beings, even in the frightening depths of their delusion.

The second Pali stanza receives a slightly less elaborate translation, with only a few details expanded from the source text. The first four stanzas of this passage read as follows:

<p>braḥ dhaṁ neḥ duk jā sgar          samrāp' vāy sūr gīk kaṁ          lāṅ' ī lōṅ raṁbaṅ          ṭā biroḥ mūl krāṅ kra-au.</p>	<p>This Dharma is likened to a drum          whose booms and beats          echo and resound          with round and lovely tones.</p>
<p>braḥ sūtr ṭā biroḥ          gī moḥ duk jā khsè phtau          paramatth jā dhaṁ jrau          duk jā spēk ṭās sgar nā.</p>	<p>The Sutras, tuneful their sound,          are likened to the rattan straps.          The Paramattha, the profound Dharma,          is like to the stretched leather head.</p>
<p>braḥ ariyasacc puon          jā dhaṁ muon māṁ nās' sā          duk ṭuc anlūn nā          samrāp' vāy sūr sābd šān.</p>	<p>The Four Noble Truths,          those steadfast teachings,          are likened to the mallet          that pounds a forceful rhythm</p>
<p>ṇiṅ nāṁ satv dau duk          gaṅ' di sukh gī braḥ nibbān          jā amatadhamm gmān          slāp' hōy paṅkōt ta dau.</p>	<p>to guide living beings          to dwell in Nibbāna's bliss,          the immortal state,          freed from death and future birth.</p>

Each simile is slightly enriched from the Pali version, though the essential meaning of the stanza does not change. The Khmer text then continues with a few stanzas summarizing how the Buddha assents to Sahampati's request. Finally, the text concludes with a verse that steps out of the narrative of the two Pali stanzas entirely and speaks directly to the ritual context:

anak e nā pān stēn stāp'	Should anyone be able to listen
pān trañ trāp' kuṃ kantōy	attentively, without lapsing,
jā puṇy bhābv gāb' hōy	this is most meritorious and fortunate—
cūr oy mān citt jrah dau hoñ	may your minds be of clear faith!

While these lines are not quite as explicit as certain Siamese examples from the third life of the chant discussed above (for example, “We invite you, O Venerable [monk] . . . to save by preaching the Dharma . . .”), they nonetheless recall the circumstances in which the text is to be recited. The Khmer stanza celebrates the benefits [*ānisaṃsa*] of listening carefully to a monk’s sermon and urges the audience to purify their minds. Here, in this sixth life, the chant draws on all five of the lives that preceded it, including both Pali and Siamese innovations, to produce an expanded text in Khmer that follows the same ritual and melodic conventions.

### Seventh and Eighth Lives: Expanded Pali and Khmer Verse Versions

In the mid-nineteenth century, likely sometime in the 1830s or 1840s, the future King Rama IV of Siam (r. 1851–1868) composed a new Pali version of the chant, representing its seventh incarnation. This Pali verse text is one of many he composed during his long tenure in the monkhood before ascending to the throne.<sup>40</sup> The future monarch’s text extends the meaning of the first Pali verse of invitation through eight stanzas of his own invention. Stanzas two through six explain how the Buddha accepted Sahampati’s invitation; stanzas seven and eight describe how the present occasion is the eighth, fourteenth, or fifteenth day of the lunar month—the appropriate occasion to listen to the preaching of the Dharma. The ninth, final stanza of his text makes the invitation to the monk explicit:

sādhu ayyo bhikkhusaṅgho	It would be good if the noble sangha of monks
karotu dhammadesanaṃ	were to give a sermon on the Dhamma
ayañ ca parisā sabbā	and for this entire assembly
aṭṭhikatvā suṇātu taṃ <sup>41</sup>	to pay attention and listen to it.

Rama IV’s Pali text, just like the Siamese and Khmer vernacular versions explored earlier, expands on the Pali source material by directly invoking the ritual context. The key innovation of his version, however, is that new material is generated in the classical language. Rama IV was committed to

the religious and expressive possibilities of Pali; he wielded the language with great precision for particular ideological ends. Ritual words, from his reformist worldview, are not real or efficacious until uttered in Pali. Hence the need to translate the ritual explication of the chant into the scriptural language, a function previously only articulated in the vernacular. Pali cannot be uttered to the Buddha and the gods alone; it must be used to address the living monastic community as well. This is the king's decidedly modernist contribution to the story of this chant.

The eighth life of the chant, while not directly linked to Rama IV's new Pali stanzas, insists on a similar parity between Pali and the vernacular. Whatever new directions are blazed by local tongues, the classical language must match as well. This imperative inverts the typical framework by which Pali is translated in the vernacular. The logic of the chant's circulation, translation, and performance implies that portions in both languages will expand as necessary to create a seamless bilingual ritual.

The most prominent Khmer version of the chant in contemporary Cambodia was composed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century by the noted Buddhist layman Suttantapriṇā Ind.<sup>42</sup> We do not know why Ind felt compelled to compose a new poem. He may have noted the infelicities in the older Khmer version, such as its interpretation of the compound *apparajakkhā*. He may have been influenced by now-lost Siamese versions that circulated in his day, for Ind was skilled in Thai as well. Or he may have wished to apply his distinctive gifts for Khmer verse to a regularly recited ritual text.<sup>43</sup> Or, in reference to Rama IV's contribution, he may have wished to create a new version that harmonized the Pali and vernacular versions into a single chanted text.

Whatever his exact motivations, Ind's version of the chant, known as "Ārāḍhanā dhammadesanā" [Invitation to Preach the Dhamma] or "Dhammadesanāyācanakathā" [Text for Inviting the Preaching of the Dhamma], achieves many of these possible aims. Like its Khmer and Siamese precedents, his poem also conforms to a twenty-two-syllable *brahmagīti* meter. In addition to incorporating both the Pali stanza adopted from the *Buddhavaṃsa* and the one composed prior to the late eighteenth century in Siam, he adds four stanzas of his own. These stanzas, while not directly borrowed from Rama IV's composition, invoke it by adopting the same eight-syllable *paṭhyāvatta* meter. Like the Siamese king's text, Ind's new Pali verses clarify

the precise ritual context. More remarkably, however, they appear to be translated from Ind's own Khmer version. Ind's Pali-Khmer composition manages to incorporate aspects of the seven previous incarnations of the chant while adding a number of key explanatory concepts not witnessed elsewhere. It is these literary elaborations, combined with Ind's talents as a poet, that have made his version the overwhelming favorite in Cambodia up to the present, and, as we shall see, the direct basis for Hộ Tông's "Bài thỉnh pháp sư."

Ind's translation of the modified *Buddhavaṃsa* stanza is the most elaborate witnessed thus far, spreading to fill ten stanzas in Khmer:

grā noḥ saḥampatī brahm jā isūr lokā cūl gāl' braḥ sāsā lök hatthā siro rāp.	At that moment Sahampati Brahmā, Lord of the Worlds, knelt before the Teacher, raised his hands to his head,
höy bol bāky dūl thā sūm karuṇā stec draṅ jṛāp tpit satv an' dan' dāp dubbalabhāb pāp kraī krās'.	and humbly spoke these words: "Please, have mercy, and be informed that living beings are soft, weak, frail, and burdened with sin.
dandjñ braḥ dharm thlai jā nissāy paccāy cpās' iḷūv draṅ' pān trās' trek ak nās' buṃ kantöy.	They wait for the precious Dharma as their clear refuge and reliance. Now that you have awakened, they rejoice and are not remiss.
satv khlaḥ krās' ṭoy kām min yal' tām trailakkha(ṅ) löy iḷūv yal' khlaḥ höy ṭoy aṃnāc braḥ mān puṇy.	Some creatures are laden with lust, not grasping the Three Marks one bit. Yet now there are some who might see thanks to your power, Meritorious One.
pö pān stāp' desanā paññā klā khlāmññ lös mun sūm braḥ ṭā mān puṇy draṅ nimant trās' desanā.	If they could hear your sermons, their minds would only grow stronger. Please, O Meritorious One, I humbly invite you to preach.
pros satv paṃpāt' sok dāmññ rāg rog rūp taṅhā ñaññit prè jā jraḥ thlā köt paññā bhiyyo yal'.	Save living beings and slay their sorrow, the sickness of their passion, their craving for the flesh, that their darkness might brighten into faith and deepen into wisdom, the means to see.

trailok gok trailakkha(ṇ) saṅsāracakr vil min ṭal' avijjā jā ṛs gal' jā paccāy nai saṅkhār.	The Three Worlds are the Three Marks' wastes. The wheel of saṃsāra whirls without end. Ignorance is the root cause, conditioning impulses to arise,
nāṃ satv oy sok sau lic laṅ' nau knuṅ saṅsār pañcamār mohandhakār ṛiṭ ruṃ ḥuṃ juṃ jāp' nau.	leading living beings to sorrow, to drown in cycles of birth and death. The Five Māras and blind delusion wrap them tight till they're stuck fast.
hetu neḥ sūm braḥ aṅg pros sroc sraṅ' ṭāk' saṃbau caṃḷaṅ satv chboḥ dau kān' trōy trāṅ nibbān nāy.	Hence, Lord, please rescue them. Lift beings aboard your boat and ferry them across to yonder Nibbāna's shore,
ṭūc kal pradīp dhaṃ sāy trasuṃ bhllī broṅ brāy paṃbhllī satv dāṃṇ lāy oy sappāy ksānt bhiramy.	as if on a great floating lantern, with branches of shining rays to enlighten all living beings so they find wellness, peace, and joy."

Some of Ind's elaborations are shared by the earlier Khmer verse version, including the idea that most living beings are mired in ignorance,<sup>44</sup> the reference to the core teaching of the Three Marks (impermanence, suffering, non-self), and the appeal for the Buddha not merely to preach the Dharma but to "save" [Khmer *pros*; Thai *prot*; cf. Sino-Vietnamese *té* 濟] living beings through such preaching. Other aspects seem to be his own contributions. These include the insistence that beings are trapped not only by ignorance but also by lust ("the sickness of their passion, their craving for the flesh"); the doctrinal explanation of cyclic existence ("Ignorance is the root cause / conditioning impulses to arise"); the notion that delusion is embodied in the "Five Māras"; and the simile likening the Buddha's teachings to a luminous vessel "to ferry [beings] across / to yonder Nibbāna's shore." These elaborations continue the trend toward poetic embellishment and doctrinal specification witnessed in previous incarnations of the chant.

Ind's translation of the second Pali stanza on the drum simile is only four stanzas long, the same as the previous Khmer version, but nonetheless adds a number of new details:

braḥ saddhamm jā sgar jāy  
 braḥ vināy jā rān dham  
 braḥ sūtr jā khsè rum  
 braḥ abhidhamm jā spèk ṭās.

The true Dhamma is the victory drum,  
 the Vinaya the great shell,  
 the Sutras the binding strings,  
 the Abhidhamma the stretched skin.

ariyasacc jā anlūn  
 saṃrāp' dūn oy ĩ cpās'  
 satv lok ñok ñuy ṇās'  
 ĩ sgar ṭās' krok lõn pān.

The Noble Truths are the mallet  
 to beat the drum for all to hear.  
 Beings in the world are sleepy and dazed;  
 roused by the drum, they might wake up.

parisād puon jamḃūk  
 ṭūc phkā jhūk knuñ jalasār  
 khlaḥ phus cām sūryadhān  
 raḥ niñ rik ṭoy rasmī.

The Four Assemblies of followers  
 are like lotus buds in the water.  
 Some will surface, waiting for sunrise,  
 then bloom at the touch of dawn's rays.

braḥ dhaṃm jā sūry sēn  
 raḥ lõn cēn cāmñ rañsī  
 paṃbhḷī lok dāmñ pī  
 oy yal' phlūv sthān sukhā.

The Dharma is the sunshine  
 that rises and gleams, casting its beams,  
 lighting up the three worlds  
 to make clear the path to bliss.

In perhaps his most distinctive contribution to the text, in this passage Ind elaborates upon the notion of the four kinds of assemblies [*parisād puon jamḃūk*]. This appears to be in reference to the Pali word *parisā* [Sanskrit *pariśad*] in the second Pali stanza [*pabodha neyye parisāya majjhe*]. The older Khmer version (the sixth life of the chant) essentially elides that part of the Pali. However, the bilingual Pali-Siamese bitext (the fifth life) makes a similar interpretation of *parisā*, again dividing it into four assemblies:

striking IMP **sound** the drum of the true Dhamma **the drum that is the True Dharma** . . . in the midst LOC **in the midst** of the assembly GEN **of the fourfold assembly** those fit to be led ACC **to the beings who can be awakened**, awaken IMP **that they may be awakened**.

The usual sense of a fourfold assembly [*catuparisā*] is that of the whole Buddhist community: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The Pali-Siamese bitext does not make explicit which sense of a fourfold assembly is intended. Ind, however, explains the meaning of *parisā* in this context by means of analogy, specifically comparing the “four kinds of assemblies” to four kinds of lotus flowers, some of which “will sprout, waiting for sunrise, / then bloom by means of dawn's rays.”



In making this comparison, Ind seems to be drawing on the meaning of the term *neyya* in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, in which it is the third member of a list of four kinds of individuals [*puggala*], namely *ugghaṭṭitaññū*, *vipañcitaññū*, *neyya*, and *padaparama*.<sup>45</sup> The Puggalappaññatti explains that in this context *ugghaṭṭitaññū* means one who awakens just by hearing the Dharma uttered [*ugghaṭṭita*]; the *vipañcitaññū* is one who awakens after hearing the Dharma explained in detail [*vitthārena atthe vibhajiyamāne dhammābhisamayo hoti*]; the *neyya* (“one fit to be led”) is one who gradually awakens by study, questioning, reflection, and attendance upon his spiritual mentor [*uddesato paripucchato yonisomanasikaroto kalyāṇamitte sevato bhajato payirupāsato anupubbena dhammābhisamayo hoti*]; and the *padaparama* is one who is not of the nature to awaken at all in this life, despite much audition, recitation, and memorization of the Dharma [*bahumpi suṇato bahumpi bhaṇato bahumpi dhārayato bahumpi vācayato na tāya jātiyā dhammābhisamayo hoti*].<sup>46</sup>

Ind’s references to Pali literature do not stop there, however. He then seems to follow the lead of Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsīnī*, which in its exegesis of the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* connects the four types of lotuses with the four kinds of individuals:<sup>47</sup>

Tattha yāni accuggamma ṭhitāni, tāni sūriyarasmisamphassaṃ  
 āgamayamānāni ṭhitāni ajja pupphanakāni. Yāni samodakaṃ ṭhitāni, tāni  
 sve pupphanakāni. Yāni udakānuggatāni antoudakaposīni, tāni  
 tatiyadivase pupphanakāni. Udakā pana anuggatāni aññānīpi  
 sarojauppalādīni nāma atthi, yāni neva pupphissanti,  
 macchakacchapabhakkhāneva bhavissanti, tāni pālīyā nārūlhāni āharitvā  
 pana dīpetabbānīti dīpitāni. Yatheva hi tāni catubbidhāni pupphāni,  
 evameva ugghaṭṭitaññū, vipañcitaññū, neyyo, padaparamoti cattāro  
 puggalā.<sup>48</sup>

Those that, having risen out [of the water], lie waiting to be touched by the rays of the sun, blossom today. Those that, sitting on the surface of the water, blossom tomorrow. Those that do not rise out of the water but remain nourished underneath the water, blossom the day after tomorrow. There are also those lotuses, which likewise do not rise above the water and in fact never blossom at all, becoming merely the food of fish and turtles—these are not mentioned in the text, but having mentioned them, however, those that should be explained are explained thus. Just as there are the four types of flowers, in

the same way there are the four individuals, viz. *ugghaṭṭitaññū*, *vipañcitaññū*, *neyya*, and *padaparama*.

Ind's text is thus more than a simple rendering of the Pali text into Khmer verse. He draws on the resources of Buddhist canonical and commentarial texts to explain latent meanings within the two terse Pali stanzas. In a few short verses, his text engages with the wide intertextual inheritance of his time, including the Pali and Siamese chants whose metrical structure it mirrors.

The remaining seven stanzas of Ind's translation, numbers fifteen to twenty-two, proceed in a new direction, one not found in the original two Pali stanzas. This part of the text provides a summary of what happened after Sahampati's entreaty, namely the Buddha's entire teaching career. And then, like the Siamese poem and Rama IV's Pali verses cited above, this translation returns to the present context of inviting a monk to preach:

sahampati brahm on paṅgaṃ ārādhanaṃ samtec braḥ bhagavā ṭoy gāthā y"añ neḥ eñ.	Sahampati Brahmā bowed down to invite the Lord, the Blessed One, with these same verses.
braḥ buddh drañ anukūl braṃ daduol niñ saṃṭṭhēñ ṭoy tuñhībhbā thlèñ tām bhāva guṇ karuṇā.	The Buddha consented and expressed his approval in silence, consistent with his compassionate state.
dōp krok cāk dī noḥ bhaktrā choḥ brai migadā(y) yāñ ceñ car līlā bī dī noḥ ṭoy braḥ pād.	He arose from that spot and went toward the Deer Park, moving by walking the distance by foot.
ñ"añ satv cūl buddhacakr mān pañcavaggī(y) jā ā(di) oy phīk amṛītajāti ras nibbān tām dhammatā.	He brought beings to the Buddhist fold, starting with the Group of Five, by having them drink the ambrosia that is Nibbāna's taste, naturally.
cāp' phtōm bī noḥ eñ drañ' saṃṭṭhēñ dhaṛm desanā dhvō buddhakṛityā as' vassā sè sip prāṃ.	From that moment on, he preached sermons on the Dharma, performing a buddha's duties for forty-five rainy seasons in all.

buṃ thay buṃ pandhūr prayoja(n) yūr añvèn chnām samrec puññakamm ṭal' sabv satv dāmñ bhab trāy.	He never stepped back or relented; the benefits extended across the years. He achieved acts of merit for all beings in the Three Worlds.
hetu noḥ iḷūv neḥ yōñ khñuṃ neḥ sādara kraī pabitr braḥ guṇ thlai sūm nimant pros desanā.	That is why right in this moment we are filled with such great joy. Venerable, O Virtuous One! We invite you to save us and preach.
anugroḥ buok parisād ṭèl jāp' khāt ṭoy mohā oy köt mām paññā prākaṭ nā dī neḥ hoñ.	Rescue those assemblies still mired in delusion, that they might give rise to wisdom right in this place!

These verses have no precedent in the two Pali stanzas translated by the old Khmer invitation text. Ind, perhaps in an effort to keep the Pali and Khmer portions of his text parallel, included four additional Pali stanzas to match the eight vernacular verses above. These stanzas match the vernacular perfectly, to the extent that every half-stanza in Pali corresponds to a full stanza in the vernacular:

evaṃ saḥampatī brahmā bhagavantam ayācatha tuṅhibhāvena taṃ buddho kāruṇṇenādhivāsaya	Thus the Brahmā Sahampatī requested the Blessed One. By means of silence, the Buddha, having resorted to compassion,
tamhā vuṭṭhāya pādena migadāyaṃ tato gato pañcavagvādayo neyye ama[ta]ṃ pāyesi dhammato	from that spot arose and by foot went to the Deer Park. As for those to be led, starting with the Group of Five, he had them drink of the Deathless, naturally.
tato pabhūti sambuddho anūnā dhammadesanaṃ māghavassāni desesi sattānaṃ atthasiddhakaṃ	From that complete beginning, the Perfect Buddha for forty-five rainy seasons preached sermons on the Dhamma to fulfill the aims of living beings.
tena sādhu ayyo bhante desetu dhammadesanaṃ sabbāyidha parisāya anukampam'pi kātave	Hence, it would be excellent, O Venerable, were you to preach a sermon on the Dhamma— please have mercy on the assembly gathered here.

The parallelism between the two languages is carried out to its logical extreme. Some half-stanzas in the Pali, such as “By means of silence, the Buddha, / having resorted to compassion” match the precise vocabulary of the vernacular (“The Buddha consented / and expressed his approval / in silence, consistent with / his compassionate state”); in both versions, “silence” [*tuṇhībhāvena/tuṇhībhāb*] and “compassion” [*kāruṇṇena/karuṇā*] are articulated with cognate terms. The same goes for “foot” [*pādena/pād*] in the third half-stanza, and “starting with the Group of Five” [*pañcavagyādayo/pañcavaggi(y) jā ā(di)*] and “naturally” [*dhammato/dhammatā*] in the fourth. These parallels go beyond the usual borrowing of Pali and Sanskrit words into Khmer and suggest an intentional strategy to keep the stanzas lexically close.

Although these four Pali verses are rarely recited in Cambodia today, their placement at the beginning of Ind’s published text suggests that they are intended to be recited first, as a preamble to the Khmer verses. However, while presented as part of the source text for Ind’s poem, it seems likely that these verses are actually his own composition, as they do not appear anywhere else in Cambodian or Siamese Pali sources. Their unusual syntax and verb tenses,<sup>49</sup> along with several hapax legomena—including *adhivāsaya* for “having resorted,”<sup>50</sup> *atthasiddhaka* for “to fulfill the aims,”<sup>51</sup> and an extremely rare Pali application of the Sanskrit *kaṭapayādi* numeral system, by which *māgha* comes to mean “forty-five”<sup>52</sup>—suggest a creative back-translation from Khmer. Ind’s Pali stanzas indicate that he strove to craft a text that was semantically balanced between the classical and the vernacular, and could be performed in the style inherited from previous incarnations of the chant.

### Ninth Life: Vietnamese Verse Translation

The ideal of Pali-vernacular bilingual chants that could be performed as seamless wholes was continued by Hộ Tông in Vietnam. As discussed in the beginning of this essay, Hộ Tông’s version of the chant, “Bài thỉnh pháp sư” [Verses for Inviting a Preacher of the Dharma] was first published in 1954, making it the most recent instantiation of the chant discussed here. The source text, though unacknowledged by the translator, is none other than the Pali-Khmer version composed by Suttantapriyā Ind. Hộ Tông’s text begins with precisely the same Pali text as Ind, including the two old verses

and the four added ones, followed by an eighteen-stanza translation into Vietnamese.<sup>53</sup> The verse form chosen for the vernacular translation is the *song thất lục bát* (7-7-6-8) meter. While Hộ Tông's *song thất lục bát* poem is presented as the translation of a Pali text into Vietnamese, it in fact reads as an ingenious rendering of Ind's Khmer text, including all of Ind's distinctive additions:

[*Buddhavaṃsa Verse*]

Thuở Phật mới đạt thành quả vị	When the Buddha had won awakening's fruit,
Có Xá hãm bát tí Phạm thiên	a Brahmā deity named Sahampati,
Cả trong thế giới các miền,	the highest god in all the worlds,
Thanh cao quan chúng cần chuyên đạo	the lofty witness to those seeking the wondrous
mầu.	Path,
Hiện trước Phật đê đầu đánh lễ,	appeared before the Buddha, bowed his head, and
Bạch xin Ngài tế thế độ nhơn.	said, "Please, Master, save the world, ferry over humans.
Chúng sanh trong khắp cõi trần;	Living beings throughout this dusty realm
Tối mê điên đảo không phân tội tình.	are crazed and deluded, never far from sin.
Cầu Phật Tổ cao minh ái truat,	Please, O Buddha, wise one freed from lust,
Hiện uy linh tinh thức dắt diu	reveal your awakened powers to guide us.
Hoàng khai đạo pháp cao siêu,	Proclaim the Path of the sublime Dharma,
Tu hành theo đặng kết nhiều thiện duyên	whose practice weaves webs of merit.
Thế Tôn được mãn viên đạo quý,	O Blessed One, winner of the precious Path,
Tôi hết lòng hoan hỉ tán dương.	I humbly offer you my joyous praise.
Nhưng vì hoàn cảnh đáng thương,	But since living beings are so pitiable,
Không đành bỏ mặc, lạc đường làm thinh.	don't give up on them or forsake the way in silence.
Chúng sanh vốn đa tình lắm bạc,	Living beings are naturally filled with lust,
Không thông đầu chơn thật giả tà.	not knowing false from true, or that
Vô thường khổ não chấp ta	all must change, is painful, and lacks essence,
Ngày nay sơ ngộ thiết tha nhờ Ngài.	yet now they might wake up, their zeal owed to you.
Xin mở lượng cao dày răn dạy,	Please teach them out of boundless compassion.
Chuyển pháp luân diễn giải diệu ngôn.	Turn the Dharma's wheel; expound it with potent
	words.
Chúng sanh nghe đặng pháp môn,	Those who listen might reach the Dharma Gate
Thoát vòng khổ não dập dòn bấy lâu.	to escape the round of pain, amassed since time
	unknown.

Giải thoát những nguồn sầu câu thúc, Diệt tham lam ái dục bao vòng. Tối tâm sẽ được sáng trong, Phát sanh trí tuệ hiểu thông tinh tường.	Free them from their sorrows and binds; destroy their greed and craving at the root. Their darkness shall turn to inner light, yielding wisdom, understanding, and clarity.
Thông thấu lẽ vô thường vẫn giới Ba tướng trong ba cõi mỏng manh.	They'll grasp the rule of impermanence, that all is brief, and the Three Marks in the Three Worlds, ever fragile.
Vô minh duyên của các Hành, Cội căn dặt dấn chúng sanh luân hồi.	For ignorance, which conditions all impulses, is the root cause that traps beings in saṃsāra,
Biển trần khổ nổi trôi chìm đắm, Bị ngũ ma vày, nắm chuyễn di, Vậy nên cầu đấng Từ Bi, Tạo thuyền Bát nhã trải đi vớt người.	floating and sinking on suffering's vast ocean, scattered and squeezed by the Five Māras. Beings pray for the Compassionate One to fashion a boat of Wisdom to save mankind,
Đưa qua chốn tốt tươi yên tịnh, Bờ Niết Bàn chẳng dính trần ai; Như đèn rọi suốt trong ngoài, Chiếu tia sáng khắp các loài hân hoan.	to ferry them to a place of peace, the shore of Nirvāṇa, beyond worldly bonds, like a lantern, glowing inside and out, shining near and far, for all to find bliss.

## [Drum Simile Verse, Eighteenth-Century Siam]

Pháp ví trống khải hoàn rầm rộ, Luật ví như đại cỗ hoàng dương. Kinh như dây buộc trên rương Luận như mặt trống vệt đường vô minh	The Dharma's like a drum, booming triumphant; the Vinaya, the drum barrel of proclamation; the Sutras, the tuning strings on the drum shell; the Abhidhamma, the drum face, cleaving ignorance.
Tứ diệu đế đó hình dùi trống, Giống khua tan giấc mộng trần gian. Chúng sanh tất cả bốn hàng, Như sen trong nước minh quang ló ngời chờ.	The Four Wondrous Truths are the drum's mallet, beating to break the dreams of this dusty world. Living beings in all the Four Assemblies are like lotuses in the water, their wisdom lying in wait.
Trời ló mọc đặng nhờ ánh sáng, <sup>54</sup> Trở hoa lành rải tản mùi hương.	The sunrise, thanks to its light, makes tender buds bloom, their fragrance wafting out.
Pháp mầu ánh sáng phi thường, Chiếu khắp ba cõi rõ đường an vui.	The wondrous Dharma, with its peerless blaze, illuminates the Three Worlds, clearing the path to joy."

[Four Verses Composed by Ind, Nineteenth-Century Cambodia]

Phạm Thiên vẫn ngậm ngùi khẩn khoản.	The Brahmā deity beseeched him persistently,
Phật nhận lời nhưng chẳng dĩ hơi.	until the Buddha accepted, without even a whisper,
Quyết lòng mở đạo dạy đời,	to widen the Path and teach the world.
Nhắm vườn Lộc Giã Ngài dõng chơn sang.	Aiming for the Deer Park, the Master traveled by foot.
Thuyết pháp độ các hàng đệ tử,	He preached the Dharma to all disciples,
Có năm Thầy thánh dự pháp từ	starting with five keen monks who heard the Dharma,
Đó là nhóm Kiều Trần Như,	that is to say, the group of Koṇḍañña,
Được nếm hương vị Hữu dư Niết Bàn.	who tasted the flavor of Nirvāṇa with Remainder.
Rồi từ đó mở mang giáo pháp,	He then expanded the teaching of the Dharma
Bốn mươi lăm hạ giáp vẹn toàn.	for forty-five monsoon seasons in all,
Một lòng chẳng thối không mòn.	with a single mind, not letting up or winding down,
Những điều lợi ích hằng còn lâu năm.	the benefits extending across the years.
Cả tam giới thừa ân phổ cập,	The Three Worlds received universal blessings,
Đám mưa lành rưới khắp thế gian.	with rain sprinkling down on the whole realm.
Bởi nhân cố, tích rõ ràng,	Thus for these reasons, clearly stated,
Thỉnh Ngài thuyết pháp noi đàng từ bi.	I invite you, Master, to kindly preach the Dharma
Chúng sanh ngồi khắp chốn ni,	to the living beings gathered here,
Tối mê cầu được trí tri vẹn toàn.	that their darkness might turn to wisdom.
(Lay)	(Bow)

Hộ Tông's text captures not only the broad contours sketched out by the Pali stanzas but also the many details added by Ind. The Three Marks [*ba tướng*], the Four Assemblies [*bốn hàng*], and the Five Māras [*ngũ ma*] all appear. Even the final part added by Ind in Pali and Khmer is faithfully rendered; indeed both texts are typically performed in Cambodia and Vietnam today using just this excerpt in place of the whole text, namely from stanzas 15–22 in the Khmer or 14–18 in the Vietnamese. Although in my translation the Vietnamese reads as slightly more verbose than the Khmer, Hộ Tông does not add much in the way of substantial details to Ind's text, mostly adding adjectives and verbs that double those already present so as to fulfill the syllable, tone, and rhyme constraints of the *song thất lục bát* meter.

The few details he does add to the text evince Hộ Tông's skill in both Sinitic and Pali commentarial traditions. For instance, in describing the first five disciples of the Buddha [*pañcavaggiya/năm Thầy*], he names the foremost among these as *Kiều Trần Như* [橋陳如], the Sino-Vietnamese name for Kauṇḍinya [Pali: Koṇḍañña]. In the following line, he adds that the attainment these disciples achieve is *Hữu dư Niết Bàn* [有餘涅槃], the Sino-Vietnamese term for *sopadhiseṣa-nirvāṇa* [Pali: *savupadisesa-nibbāna* or *saupādisesa-nibbāna*], or "Nirvāṇa with Remainder," meaning the liberation achieved during life as opposed to at death. These details, not present in Ind's version, demonstrate Hộ Tông's command over the material and his skill in writing to a Vietnamese audience more familiar with Sinitic as opposed to Pali technical terms.

In the final line of all Vietnamese editions of the text available to me is the word *lạy*, meaning "bow" (cf. Siamese/Khmer *krāp*). This is an explicit ritual instruction to the layperson or laypeople reciting the text to bow down to the monk (or rarely a nun) once they have finished their chanted invitation. Like other incarnations of the chant, the Vietnamese version makes the ritual context clear in the closing stanzas. The pithy addition of the word *lạy* simply drives home this ceremonial usage of the text for inviting a monk to give a sermon.

The poem's meter, while not exactly parallel to the Khmer *brahmagīti* or the Siamese *kāby yānī* 11, has the virtue of being easily chanted in Vietnamese in addition to imparting a classical style to the text. In so doing, Hộ Tông's poem achieves a measure of performative parity with its Khmer antecedent and other past incarnations. Moreover, the Vietnamese poem succeeds in completely domesticating the Khmer text, to the extent that the audience need not have the slightest clue that it was translated from Khmer rather than Pali. Hộ Tông's version gives the chant its most complete and elaborate expression yet in its ninth life.

## Conclusion

These nine lives are just a snapshot of a Theravada liturgical tradition in motion. Since the 1950s, numerous other texts have been composed in Cambodia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia to accompany the ritual invitation of a monk to preach. Some are penned as preludes or codas to the main



invitation chant, while others aim to replace it. More such texts will appear as old diction slips into obscurity and chanting fashions come and go. These new compositions extend the lineage of the nine explored here; they represent distinct events in the chant's history while continuing the same set of underlying ideas.

Looking back to the first Pali stanza from the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the chant for inviting a monk to preach passed through a long process of circulation and translation before arriving at Hộ Tông's "Bài thỉnh pháp sư." The original *Buddhavaṃsa* verse was reworked in second-millennium Southeast Asia to conform to a single meter for effortless chanting performance. The third life emerged when translators in eighteenth-century Siam rendered the chant into Thai verse, with some adding explicit invitations to preach. Sometime in the same century, the fourth and fifth incarnations likely arose when a second Pali stanza was composed and transmitted in an elegant Pali-Siamese bitextual format. These innovations were likely the basis for a sixth life in the early nineteenth century, in which an unknown Khmer translator rendered both Pali stanzas into Khmer verse. In the 1830s or 1840s, the future Rama IV of Siam penned eight additional Pali verses to make the ritual context explicit in Pali, just as earlier translators had done for the vernacular. Although not directly based on the Siamese king's text, Ind's late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century Pali-Khmer verse version added four new Pali stanzas, once again harmonizing ritual context and melodic performance across the classical and the vernacular. This eighth life served as the basis for Hộ Tông's version of the chant, translated into Vietnamese in the mid-twentieth century. From the high ground of hindsight, we can witness how a single verse unleashed a flood of poetry, recited before countless sermons over the centuries.

At each stage of the chant's circulation across Southeast Asia, redactors and translators relied on a few core principles, binding each distinct life to a larger narrative. One, the duty of the Theravada liturgical poet is to expand and elaborate upon the text over time. Two, rather than jettisoning the Pali portions, vernacular translations should retain and even amplify them. Three, the vernacular and Pali portions of the finished ritual text should be harmonized. Ritual gestures, performative contexts, and chanting cadences ought to find parity across the two languages. The Pali must

precede, in both sequence and stature, yet the vernacular cannot abandon its parent.

The nine lives leading to “*Bài thỉnh pháp sư*” reflect broader patterns in the circulation of texts in Theravada Southeast Asia, particularly in cultures and eras where Pali functions as a classical language. First, the circulation of texts depends on tacit agreements on how to translate them. This includes specific technical features of Pali-vernacular bitexts, but also the principles of expansion, inclusion, and combination discussed above in reference to short Buddhist chants. Agreement on such principles makes sharing vernacular and classical texts across the region possible, allowing for Theravada chants to circulate between Siam and Laos, Lanna and Sipsongpanna, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Second, master narratives such as Pollock’s “vernacular millennium” and Wolters’ “localization” do not neatly accord with the Theravada situation in Southeast Asia.<sup>55</sup> Buddhist prose and poetry from this region reveal how the vernacular supplemented Pali but never fully replaced it. In particular, Pali and vernacular literary cultures, at least in the religious sphere, continued to seed one another, even into the early twentieth century. It is much harder, in other words, to point to decisive moments of vernacularization or localization in mainland Southeast Asia. What happens to the vernacular when the classical refuses to leave its side?

Third, Buddhist byways proved efficient vectors for communication and exchange across linguistic boundaries. The tools of translation, first honed in monastic contexts but later linked to elite literary pursuits as well, made possible the circulation of ideas across Southeast Asia. Many translators in this process remained anonymous and others (such as Hộ Tông) obscured their sources, so their motives in translation can be difficult to trace. Nevertheless, the intellectual efforts of these translators combined to shape a region where texts could expect to live multiple lives. The nine iterations that span the *Buddhavaṃsa* to “*Bài thỉnh pháp sư*” give us a glimpse into one such Theravada trajectory in Southeast Asia.

The arrival of Theravada Buddhism, or *Phật Giáo nguyên-thủy*, in Vietnamese-speaking communities in Sài Gòn and surrounding areas during the middle of the past century forces us to rethink conventional narratives about how Buddhism spreads. Although the Mahayana tradition remains predominant in Vietnam, the rise of the movement founded by

Hộ Tông and his associates demonstrates that the Buddhist map is not fixed and the relative popularity of the religion's sects remains in flux. The transmission of Theravada to Kinh communities was predicated not on kings, councils, merchants, or magicians, but rather on a flourishing print culture, a finely honed skill in translation, and a ready-made liturgical package. The success of Hộ Tông's chants, including "Bài thỉnh pháp sư," in finding an enduring place in Vietnamese Theravada practice reflects the means of its entrée into urban Buddhist society in the south.

The significance of "Bài thỉnh pháp sư," however, goes beyond its status as an emblem of the Theravada tradition's foothold in Hồ Chí Minh City and among Vietnamese Buddhists abroad. On the one hand, Hộ Tông's transformation of Suttantapīṭhā Ind's "Ārāḍhanā dhammadesanā" into "Bài thỉnh pháp sư" embodies a particular event in Theravada history, in which a Khmer modernist understanding of Buddhism was transplanted in Vietnam. On the other hand, "Bài thỉnh pháp sư" is more than just one life of a chant; it contains a whole lineage of past incarnations stretching back to the formation of the Pali Tipiṭaka. Read as an idea, "Bài thỉnh pháp sư" reflects Hộ Tông's craft in expressing a long Theravada tradition of ritual invitations for sermons and the importance of constructing a chant that fit these ritual and ideological constraints.

The historical thrust of Theravada Buddhism, including its recent spread among the Vietnamese, cannot be captured by paying attention to events alone. As Hallisey reminds us, "Only when we begin to trace the history of phenomena with a dual character as events and ideas will we begin to see the Theravāda as it truly is: not as an unchanging conceptual system, not as a static structure, but as a complex human movement in a perpetual process of constitution and reconstitution."<sup>56</sup> The never-ending movements of adoption, transformation, and circulation epitomized by the nine incarnations of "Bài thỉnh pháp sư" summon scholars of Theravada to attend to liturgies as living witnesses to Buddhist history, blessed or burdened with memories from many past lives.

## Supplemental Material

Audio recordings of the chant are available as supplemental materials at <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2020.15.3.36>.

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ABSTRACT

*The story of how Theravada Buddhism came to be adopted among urban Kinh communities in southern Vietnam challenges how scholars narrate Buddhist history. Focusing on the transformation of a single liturgical text—a chant, originally in the Pali language, to invite a monk to give a sermon—as it circulates across Thailand and Cambodia before its eventual translation from Khmer into Vietnamese in the mid-twentieth century, this essay reveals how chants grow as they circulate, how Theravada liturgies unsettle distinctions between classical and vernacular languages, and how ritual and ideological necessities shape translation in new cultural contexts.*

KEYWORDS: *Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam, Khmer Buddhist literature, Thai Buddhist literature, translation in Southeast Asia, history of Buddhism*

Notes

1. Charles Hallisey, “Councils as Ideas and Events in the Theravāda,” in *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 2, *Seminar Papers 1988–1990*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1992), 133–148.
2. Hallisey, “Councils as Ideas and Events,” 136.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Hallisey, “Councils as Ideas and Events,” 142, citing Heinz Bechert, “Theravāda Buddhist Saṅgha: Some General Observations on Historical and Political Factors in Its Development,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (1970): 761–778.
5. Steven Collins’ notion of a “Pali imaginaire,” along with Peter Skilling’s metaphor of a Pali “databank,” are particularly instructive in this regard. See

- Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 76–77; Peter Skilling, “King Rāma I and Wat Phra Chetuphon: The Buddha-Sāsana in Early Bangkok,” in *How Theravāda Is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, ed. Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2012), 336–347.
6. This was certainly the case before the mid-twentieth century in almost all Khmer, Tai Khün, Tai Lü (Dai Lue), Tai Nuea, and Shan communities outside of select royal and elite temples. Surviving manuscript evidence suggests that complete copies were more common in Lanna, Lao, and Siamese libraries, but such collections were generally restricted to centers of monastic learning; remote temples without powerful lay patrons could hardly expect to maintain a complete Tipiṭaka on palm leaf. Complete manuscript copies survive in Burmese, Mon, and Sinhalese contexts as well, though certainly not at every temple.
  7. For the standard Dhammayuttika liturgy, including many of Rama IV’s compositions, see Samtéc Braḥ Sāṅgharāj (Pussadeva) สมเด็จพระสังฆราช (ปัฐสเทว), *Svat man(i) chpāp hlvañ sivatmanatṭambhalaṅ* [Royal Edition Chanting Book] (Kruñ deb กรุงเทพ: Mahāmaḥaṭ rājavidyālay mahamaḥarajavitayalai, 2496 [1953]).
  8. David Wharton, “Meditation in Tai Nuea Buddhist Lay Practice,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 20, no. 1–2 (2019): 292–313.
  9. Richard Gombrich, “A New Theravadin Liturgy,” in *The Life of Buddhism*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Jason A. Carbine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 180–193.
  10. For example, Theravada organizations receive only a passing mention in the events leading to the formation of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam [Giáo hội Phật giáo Việt Nam Thống nhất] in Thích Nhất Hạnh’s massive three-volume history of Buddhism in Vietnam, written under a lay nôm de plume. Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận* [History of Vietnamese Buddhism] (Hà Chí Minh City: Phương Đông, 2019).
  11. Binh Anson, “Hòa Thượng Hộ Tông Vansarakkhita,” June 1999, www.budsas.net/uni/u-vbud/vbpha254.htm (accessed April 1, 2020); Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 202. On Juon Nāt’s (Chuan Nath’s) activities during this period, see Penny Edwards, “Making a Religion of the Nation and Its Language: The French Protectorate (1863–1954) and the Dhammakāy,” in *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, eds. John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie, 63–85 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 76–81.
  12. Mark W. McLeod, “The Way of the Mendicants: History, Philosophy, and Practice at the Central Vihara in Hồ Chí Minh City,” *Journal of Vietnamese*

- Studies* 4, no. 2 (2009): 70; Hoang Trong So, “On the Form of Existence of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam,” *Pārigaku Bukkyō Bunkagaku* 八—)学仏教文化学 (*Journal of Pali and Buddhist Studies*) 13 (December 1999): 1; Philip Taylor, *The Khmer Lands of Vietnam* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), 240.
13. Thiện Minh, “Tỳ khưu Hộ Tông (Bhikkhu Vaṅsarakkhita),” www.phatgiaonguyenthuy.com/author/tac-gia/tk-ho-tong.html (accessed March 31, 2020); Quang Minh Thich, “Vietnamese Buddhism in America” (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 2007), 112.
  14. Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), 143–172.
  15. Various editions exist, including Vaṅsarakkhita Bhikkhu [Hộ Tông], *Lễ bái tam-bảo* [Rites for Venerating the Triple Gem] (Sài Gòn/Gia Định: Theravada phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ/Pháp-quang-tự, 1959); *Lễ bái tam-bảo, cư-sī luật tóm tắt* [*Tiratana panāma, gihivinaya sankhepa*; Rites for Venerating the Triple Gem, Abbreviated Rules for Laypeople] (Sài Gòn/Gia Định: Theravada phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ/Thạnh mậu, 1963); and *Kinh nhật tụng: Theravada, phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ* [Daily Chants: Theravada, Original Buddhism] (Bumpass, VA: Saddhamma Meditation Society – Tâm Pháp Thiền Viện, 2011). The earliest known Vietnamese printing, to my knowledge, dates to 1954 and is entitled *Nhứt hành của người tại gia tu Phật* [Daily Practices for Householder Buddhist Practitioners]. This version is reproduced in *Toàn tập Trường lão Hoà thượng Hộ Tông* [Collected Works of the Elder Monk Hộ Tông] ed. Thiện Minh (Hà Nội: Hồng Đức, 2017), 335–391. For the original Khmer text, see Ūm Sūr អ៊ុម ស៊ួរ and Juon Nāt ជួន ណាត, *Traipraṇāma saṅkhepa niṅ gihivināya saṅkhepa* អ្នកត្រូវណាមសង្ខេប និង គិបវិធីធម្មសង្ខេប [Abbreviated Veneration of the Triple Gem and Abbreviated Rules for Laypeople] (Bhnam beñ ភ្នំពេញ: Buddhasāsana paṇḍity ពុទ្ធសាសនបណ្ឌិត្យ, 2003). For an analysis of the Khmer text, see Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860–1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 155–157.
  16. Vaṅsarakkhita Bhikkhu [Hộ Tông], *Dasa pāramī: thập độ* [The Ten Perfections] (Sài Gòn: Theravada phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ, 1961); *Qui-vương vấn-đạo* [*Yakkha pañhā*; Questions of the Ogres] (Sài Gòn: Theravada phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ/Long-giang, 1965); and *Luật xuất-gia tóm tắt* (*Pabbajita vinaya saṅkhepa*) [Abbreviated Rules for Ordination] (Sài Gòn: Theravada phật-giáo nguyên-thuỷ, 1966).
  17. One exception is the Vietnamese edition of the Khmer book *Ariyasaccakathā* អរិយសច្ចកថា [On the Noble Truths], originally composed by Braḥ Mahāvimaladharmma Thoñ ព្រះមហាវិមលធម្ម ចោង (1862–1927) and edited by Ūm Sūr អ៊ុម ស៊ួរ (1881–1939), which Lê Văn Giảng (the lay name of Hộ Tông)

- published as *Tứ Diệu đế Kinh* [Sutta on the Four Noble Truths] sometime in the 1930s. In his preface, he thanks the original Cambodian author and editor, but does not clarify whether the Vietnamese translation came from Khmer or directly from Pali (Thiện Minh, *Toàn tập Trường lão Hoà thượng Hộ Tông*, 282). For more on Braḥ Mahāvimaladharmā Thoñ and Ûm Sûr, see Hansen, *How to Behave*, 101–104 and 134–142.
18. Taylor, *The Khmer Lands of Vietnam*, 240–241. Whether ethnic discrimination played a role as well is not clear.
  19. My use of “covert” here differs slightly from typical usage in translation studies, in which the overt/covert distinction applies to whether readers are aware they are working with a translation or not, not whether the translator hides the language the work is being translated from. For a discussion of Juliane House’s and Ernst-August Gutt’s approaches to overt/covert translations, see Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 32–34.
  20. On the emergence of a modernist Theravada identity in this period, see Todd LeRoy Perreira, “Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term,” in *How Theravāda Is Theravāda?*, 443–571.
  21. For a portrait of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the events leading up to the Sixth Buddhist Council, see Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America’s Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 29–34.
  22. For other studies of intra–Southeast Asian circulation and translation of Theravada texts, see Grégory Kourilsky, “La place des ascendants familiaux dans le bouddhisme des Lao” (PhD dissertation, École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2015), and François Lagirarde, “Textes bouddhiques du pays khmer et du Lanna: un exemple de parenté,” in *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, ed. François Bizot (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994), 101–139.
  23. All of their translations are freely available online at Binh Anson, “Buddhasasana: Con Đường Giải Thoát” [Buddhism: The Way to Liberation], June 25, 2009, [www.budsas.org/uni/index.htm](http://www.budsas.org/uni/index.htm) (accessed April 1, 2020).
  24. Thiện Minh, *Toàn tập Trường lão Hoà thượng Hộ Tông*, 335.
  25. Peter Skilling, “Ārādhanaṃ Tham: ‘Invitation to Teach the Dhamma,’” in *Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia: Selected Papers*, ed. Claudio Cicuzza (Bangkok: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, 2009), 83.
  26. All translations from Pali, Thai, Khmer, and Vietnamese sources are my own.
  27. For a translation of the text, see I. B. Horner, *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part III* (1975; repr., Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2000), 1–99.
  28. Skilling, “Ārādhanaṃ Tham,” 80–89.
  29. Presumably *varotam*, from Pali *vara + uttama*.

30. Transliterated from a transcribed oral version, date of composition and author unknown, posted anonymously to an online forum on May 15, 2013, [www.buddha-dhamma.com/index.php?lay=boardshow&ac=webboard\\_show&No=1422137](http://www.buddha-dhamma.com/index.php?lay=boardshow&ac=webboard_show&No=1422137) (accessed January 20, 2019). Transliteration of Khmer and Siamese sources in this essay follows the system outlined in Trent Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism: Communal Scripts, Localized Translations, and the Work of the Dying in Cambodian Chanted Leporellos” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), xiii–xvii.
31. These include the five-syllable *bara ā-rya* [ba-ra-ā-ra-ya] for the normally two-syllable *bar āry* [bar-ār] and the four-syllable *guṇ-ṇa nibbān* [guṇ-ṇa-nib-bān] for the three-syllable *guṇ nibbān* [guṇ-nib-bān]. For a detailed explanation of these processes of syllable breaking and syllable crossover in older Siamese poetry, see Thomas J. Hudak, *The Indigenization of Pali Meters in Thai Poetry* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1990), 101–105.
32. Braḥ Grū Vimala’ārthavādī พระครูวิมลวรรณวาที, *Hnāñ sī svat buddhaman(t) bidhī chpāp sampūra(ṅ)* หนังสือสวดพุทธมนต์พิธี ฉบับสมบูรณ์ [Book for Reciting Buddhist Chants and Rituals, Complete Edition] (Kruñ deb กรุงเทพฯ: dī, raḥlik nān braḥ rājadān blōñ śab a. śubhajāy yēm<sub>2</sub>juṭī ที่ระลึกงานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ อ. ศุภชัย เข้มขุติ, 2538 [1995]), 262–263.
33. Damrong Rajanubhab สมเด็จพระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ พระองค์เจ้าจิตตารกุมาร กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, *Svat man(t) plè chpāp haa braḥ samut vajirañāṅ* ฉบับหอพระสมุดวชิรญาณ [Translated Chants, Vajirañāṅa Library Edition] (Kruñ deb กรุงเทพฯ: dī, raḥlik nāi kār braḥ rājadān blōñ śab braḥ mahā rājamaṅgalatilak (puñrōñ puṇṇako pa.dha. 5) lèḥ braḥ deb visuddhiñān (upal nandako pa.dha. 9) ṇa meru hlvañ hnā<sub>2</sub> blāp blā isariyābhara(ṅ) vāt debaśirindrāvāsa ที่ระลึกในการพระราชทานเพลิงศพ พระมหารัชมมงคลดิลก (บุญเรือน ปุณฺณโก ป.ศ. ๕) และ พระเทพวิสุทธิญาณ (อุบล นนฺโทโก ป.ศ. ๕) ณ เมรุหลวงหน้าพลับพลาอิศริยาภรณ์ วัดเทพศิรินทราวาส, 2542 [1999]), 336–337.
34. Skilling, “Ārādhanaṅ Tham,” 88–89.
35. Damrong Rajanubhab, *Svat man(t) plè*, 336–337.
36. I provide a definition of this term and an overview of how such compositions are structured in Theravada contexts in Trent Walker, “Bilingualism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Theravada Buddhism*, eds. Ashley Thompson and Stephen Berkwitz (London: Routledge, forthcoming). For further analysis of interphrasal Pali-vernacular bitexts in Siam, see Trent Walker, “Indic-Vernacular Bitexts from Thailand: Bilingual Modes of Philology, Exegetics, Homiletics, and Poetry, 1450–1850,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140, no. 3 (forthcoming).



37. Skilling translates this line in a similar way: “May the Dhamma be taught: take pity on these beings” (“Ārāḍhanā Tham,” 81).
38. This interpretation in fact matches that of I. B. Horner’s translation of the first verse of the *Buddhavaṃsa*. See Horner, *The Minor Anthologies*, 1.
39. I am only aware of one Cambodian who knew the text by heart, namely the late Kun Sopheap (1956–2020) of the Fonds pour l’Édition des Manuscrits du Cambodge in Phnom Penh. He encountered it but once in a palm-leaf manuscript and, with his extraordinary gifts, immediately committed it to memory. My edition of the text is based on a comparison of his oral version and the witness of a leporello (accordion-folded paper manuscript), catalog number UBo69, dating to 1928. For more on this particular manuscript, see Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism,” 832–836. A partial version, first published in 1915 and containing only the opening nine stanzas, appears in Suos(ti) ស្នេដ្ឋី, *Uposathakathā ខណៈសកថា* [On Holy Days] (Bhnam beñ ភ្នំពេញ: Paṇṇāgār M<sup>ī</sup>i Sukh បណ្ណាគារ ភ្នំសុខ, 1954), 182–184.
40. For a complete collection of such works, see Rama IV พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, *Prañjum bra rājaniban(dh) bhāṣā pālī nai braḥ pād samtéc braḥ caam klau<sub>2</sub> cau<sub>2</sub> ayū, hvā* ประชุมพระราชนิพนธ์ภาษาบาลีในพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว [Collected Royal Compositions in Pali by Rama IV] (Kruñ deb กรุงเทพฯ: Mahātherasamāgam มหาเถรสมาคม, 2547 [2004]).
41. *Samtéc Braḥ Sāṅgharāj* (Pussadeva), *Svat man(i) chpāp hlvañ*, 401. The entire text appears on pages 399–401.
42. The text was first published posthumously in 1926–1927, but was likely composed decades earlier: Suttantaprijā Ind សុត្តន្តប្រឹជា ឥន្ទ, “Ārāḍhanā dhammakathik oy samtēñ dhaṛm អាណាធម្មកថិត្យសម្តែងធម៌” [Invitation to a Preacher to Preach the Dharma], *Kambuja Suriya កម្ពុជសុរិយា* 1 (1926–1927): 34–37. Many of Ind’s compositions circulated in manuscript and oral form during this period. On the context and significance of his writings, see Hansen, *How to Behave*, 148–183.
43. Ind’s fame as a skilled poet lives on in his other liturgical works. One particularly well-known example in Cambodia is his Khmer verse translation of the Pali “Jayamaṅgala-aṭṭha-gāthā” [Stanzas on the Eight Victories]. For a presentation of this text, see Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism,” 1035–1037. For the earliest printed version, see Suttantaprijā Ind សុត្តន្តប្រឹជា ឥន្ទ, “Dhaṛm buddhajāyamaṅgal ធម៌ពុទ្ធជីយមង្គល” [The Blessings of the Buddha’s Victories], *Kambuja Suriya កម្ពុជសុរិយា* 1 (1926–1927): 29–33.
44. However, unlike in the older Khmer version, Ind’s text makes it clear that, despite the depth of creatures’ ignorance, “there are some who might see / thanks to your power, Meritorious One.”

45. Richard Morris, ed., *The Aṅguttara-nikāya, Part II* (London: Pali Text Society, 1888), 135.
46. Richard Morris, ed., *The Puggala-paññatti* (London: Pali Text Society, 1883), 41.
47. The canonical passage, which mentions only three types of lotuses, appears in Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 214.
48. William Stede, *The Sumaṅgala-Vilāsini, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha-Nikāya, Part II* (London: Pali Text Society, 1931), 468–469. For a reflection on the relationship between the four individuals and the simile of the lotus pond, see Supak Mahavarakorn, “The Pokkharāṇī Pond in the *Jātakatthakathā*: A Treasure of Perfection,” *Rian Thai: International Journal of Thai Studies* 3 (2010): 283–301. On the relationship between the four individuals and the three types of bodhisattas, see Daniel M. Stuart, *The Stream of Deathless Nectar: The Short Recension of the Amatarasadhārā of the Elder Upatissa: A Commentary on the Chronicle of the Future Buddha Metteyya, with a Historical Introduction* (Bangkok: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation and Lumbini International Research Institute, 2017), 167n32.
49. Rare verb forms in the text include *kātave*, an alternative infinitive form for *karoti* (usually *kātuṃ*), used here for metrical reasons.
50. All witnesses read *adhivāsaya*, though *adhivasāya* is likely the grammatically correct form. Neither are attested elsewhere in Pali literature.
51. *Atthasiddhaka* also plays with the given name of the Buddha, *Siddhattha/Siddhārtha*, “he by whom aims are fulfilled.” *Atthasiddhaka* (*atthasiddha* + *ka* suffix) in this context means the Dharma, or “that which causes the fulfillment of the aims [of living beings].”
52. In the *kaṭapayādi* system, the syllable *ma* (and likewise *ṇa*, *ṇa*, and *śa*) stands in for the numeral 5 and the syllable *gha* (along with *jha*, *ḍha*, *bha*, and *va*) stands in for 4. Vowels are not taken into account, and such numerical compounds are read right to left, so thus *māgha* = *ma* + *gha* = 5 + 4 = 45. For more on the *kaṭapayādi* system, see Kim Plofker, *Mathematics in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 75–77. As far as I am aware, this is the only instance of the *kaṭapayādi* system in use in a Pali text from Cambodia; it occurs in a few Pali compositions from elsewhere in Southeast Asia but is primarily restricted to Sanskrit treatises from India.
53. My presentation of the Vietnamese poem is based on that printed in Hộ Tông, *Kinh nhật tụng của cư sĩ*, 68–70. Other recent printed versions, with minor variations, include Thiện Minh, *Toàn tập Trường lão Hoà thượng Hộ Tông*, 364–365, and Hộ Tông, *Kinh nhật tụng*, 26–27.
54. I read this *lố* (present in all versions available to me) as *lố*.

55. Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 41–74; O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 1999), 87.
56. Hallisey, "Councils as Ideas and Events," 148.